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W.S.C.H.S. Oral History

Wed. Oct. 22, 1996
Dorian Kimball

Interviewed by Celine Passage and Evelyn McClure

E: Dorian, should we start talking about your grandfather and that generation?

D: I really don't know, just what my mother said.

E: George Strout. Who was he married to. He was married two times - three times? Who was his first wife?

D: George Allen Strout. I don't know, Oh yes I do she's the one that has the great big Strout grave. Her name was Harriet Strout. No that was his mother, I'm sorry. I don't know who his wife was. She passed away. I think they had four sons and they came out from Maine.

E: He was married in Maine? All the children were born in Maine?

D: I'm not sure. I think they were. They were a lot older.

E: Do you know what year they came to California?

D: No, before the turn of the century.

E: Then they settled here in Sebastopol?

D: No from what I understand my grandfather went to Eureka first. He came out as a teacher. Before he came from Maine he went to Boston and from Boston moved to Eureka. People were coming to the West at that time. To seek a new life.

E: How long did they stay there?

D: I don't know but I understand he took a course - they had these schools where you learned to do all this mill work. He just so, he loved it so much. He gave up his teaching and from what I understand he searched for a place where he could buy a planing mill and he found one here in Sebastopol. That was what drew him here. He bought somebody out or started it up. It was called Analy Planing Mill when he had it. He had it until 1915 when Mr. Bridges (Bridgeford?) the man who lived next door, he bought the planing mill from my grandfather.

E: Do you remember some of the buildings your family talked about that he had built.

D: Yes I do remember the Howell House,very well. On North High and Wilton. He built that for the butcher, Mr. Howell was the town butcher. He was even alive when I was a little child. During the depression we'd be sent downtown to get 15 cents a pound of hamburger for meatloaf or something. He always gave us a hotdog to eat on the way home. Mr. Howell did.

E: They must have made it themselves which was a different kind of hot dog then we get today?

D: Oh they were so good. I do remember now that was when I was in grammar school. I loved that house so much and I was very fortunate because when I was living on High Street after my mother passed away and the home was sold and I was living on High Street in the old Jewell house which is across from the library, It is painted blue now. I lived in that. I tutored two high school girls that lived in the Howell house. The lady who lived there had two daughters and I tutored them. I got to go to that house all the time. I was in and out of that house two and three times a week.

E: Was it similar to the Strout house?

D: Very similar. It was NOT as quite as elaborate as this one (Strout house) but it was...I just loved it.

E: Did it have an interesting staircase? I've heard it did.

D: It wasn't all this redwood. He has all these scrolls on the side. The people who originally owned it. I think they were real estate people lived in there for years. When they moved out they took all the scrolls off and took it with them. This was in the Howell House. It was so pretty. Those people who had it, I should have brought the picture, I took a beautiful picture of it. They kept it up beautifully. It was all painted white inside. Just beautiful. When they left they picked off the scrolls. My grandfather made all that.

E: You grew up in the Strout house? Your mother inherited it?

D: The three, sisters, my mother and her sisters inherited the Strout house and the boys they had a summer home in St. Helena. That's where people had summer homes those days. They had another house up there and the boys inherited that. I think they sold it to some lodge of some type. I've never seen it but heard my mother talk about it a lot. That's why the girls got the house.

E: Who were, would you tell us your mother's name and your aunts' names.?

D: My mother was Rowena Strout. My aunt was, her ~~X~~older sister was Erma Strout. Sylver Elizabeth was the middle one.

E: That's an unusual name.

D: She was Sylver. S-Y-L-V-E-R. I guess its a family name, a version of Sylvia. This is Wilmer and my uncle Zeno.

E: There are so many different layers here having been married three times. Did George have children with each wife?

D: Apparently. They're all his. All Strouts.

E: And your mother is the daughter of the third wife.

D: Oh no, he didn't I take it back. Florence Strout, the third widow. She already had her own family. My mother used to tell us about all these step and half brothers, and sisters and real ones. These are all siblings (Erma, Sylver, Zeno and Wilmer) but Florence, she was the last wife.

E: But she wasn't the mother of your mother?

D: No, my grandmother, mother was Millicent Strout. She (grandmother?) was a Saunders

E: She was a Sonoma County person?

D: I understand the Saunders lived outside Healdsburg. Mother's cousin Wallace Saunders, had a home in Healdsburg was where the family had lived for a long time. I guess that's where they were living when my grandfather married. Wallace is connected to my mother's family. They didn't speak much about genealogy when I was young like they do now. We just heard stories and when people would gather we would know who they were. We didn't know what they were.

E: Your family lived in the Strout house and you were brought up there. How long did you live there?

D: I lived there for 53 years. I came home on weekends, I spent most of my summers there and I spent the last few years living in the home taking care of my mother. So I gave up my teaching job and took care of my mother, I was the eldest and I didn't have any family. I never married.

E: What was your father's name?

D: Oscar Franklin Kimball.

E: He was a Sebastopol person?

D: No he was born in Medina, Ohio.

E: How did your parents meet?

D: Mother was teaching in Needles and the train came through there. They had those Harvey houses. It was very, very hot and everybody just took their blankets out and slept on the lawn in front of the Harvey House. They'd go in and eat at the Harvey House and my daddy was working for the railroad and would come in there and eat. So that's how they met. My daddy had a relative that lived here in town, the Huntley's. That's where I got my middle name, Mildred, from Mrs. Huntley who was my daddy's favorite aunt. I had the privilege of meeting her about a year before my mother passed away she came up to visit my mother. She lived in the Bay area and heard my mother was ill. She came to visit us. She's my namesake, I was so thrilled, we were always very close in thought but never in..I never saw her so I was thrilled about that. My mother named all the girls' first name and my daddy named the middle names. My daddy named the boys and my mother gave them middle names.

C: Wow, organized. Three daughters and three boys.

D: That's why my oldest brother has the middle name Strout. Its traditional. I have a brother that came after me, he's in a grave up there if you wanted to know about that. He was stillborn. His name was Richard. We have a baby corner in our graveyard where the babies are.

E: I've noticed that. Your father died and your mother....

D: My father died in 1969 when I was in England. My mother called . I asked do you want me to come home? She said no your father was so proud being a teacher and being over there teaching and he wouldn't want you to have to come home so I didn't.

E: When did your mother die?

D: My mother died in 1976 in the bicentennial year. She died on May 1st.

E: What happened to the house after your parents were gone?

D: Well I lived in it for a year. They were going to put boards all over the windows. You know how they do houses when they've in escrow. I don't understand it.

E: Was it damaged?

D: No they do that to homes.

E: Was it empty?

D: I lived in it.

E: Well you lived there why would they want to board it up?

D: They were going to. Well when a house is not lived in. They just board it up until an estate is taken care of. I lived in it so they didn't do that.

E: Probate proceedings.

D: Yes. I lived in the house. We had a broken sash anyone could have climbed in.

C: Your mother died while you were in England?

D: No, my father died.

C: Then you came back?

D: And took care of my mother. I came back and I taught some and then my mother had a stroke and I took care of her in this house for about two years until she died. Then I wanted to keep the house. But my brothers and sisters were all settled in their own homes and had their own life. I went to the bank to see if I could get some kind of way to keep it. I wanted to make a

nursery, a kindergarten there. But no, I didn't have enough money for them to even consider me.

C: So your family bought you out.?

D: No we all inherited a little bit but it had to go to so many people.

E: So the house had to be sold to divide up the proceeds for the inheritances?

D: The house was only sold for $110,000. That's all they got.

E: It's a lot for 1976. Because it was a pretty magnificent home.

D: There were termites. A lot of work had to be done on the house. However this window here (shows picture indicating 2nd story, north window) that came from Maine around the Horn. A most beautiful window. During the war on the airplanes coming over and landing. they would jiggle it so.

E: Is it stained glass?

D: Its moss glass in a harlequin pattern. Real moss glass, old colors they don't have now. So the military, Hamilton AFB was the one, they paid to have it restored and they put these little braces made out of very, very fine lead. That window was worth $5,000. It was lavenders...it's still there, you can't take it out it would crumble. My brother has this window (facing front to street) they got out of here but there's no way they could take it out (the second story one) it would destroy it. We left it with the house. We treated that house like a person.

E: Did someone buy it immediately after probate was settled?

D: I was there for a year and we had all these people coming in. I had to move out, I was there a little more than a year. I moved out just before Thanksgiving. Mr. Quayle, father, the man that has the house now on the property. His father bought the house. His father was a district attorney in Los Angeles. He had a hobby of restoring old houses and he loved the house. He bought it, had it all restored. Then the Duffy's lived there for awhile. The Duffy's rented it I guess. Then they moved out. Some people bought it and made it into a bed and breakfast. It was a B&B for maybe 5-6 years. I should have brought a picture. It had a big sign.

E: I saw a flyer for it. Somewhere.

D: I had a lot of little pictures. I should have brought . They took all the lawn out they just have ground cover now. I don't think they took that beautiful oriental plum, oriental apple, crab apple tree out. I still think its there. My aunt planted it from a little stick. People used to drive buy to see that tree. I have some beautiful pictures of that if you'd like to have some.

E: Who lived in it after the Duffy's?

D: I had some lovely experiences when it was a bed and breakfast. The people that bought it. Mr. Quayle owned it and leased it out to them. Jan and Buzz, what was their last name. They had a wonderful B&B there. They were warm people. Nothing to draw people here, people

who had someone at the hospital...they made the back into a bridal suite for weddings. Then they did lease the house people would stand on the staircase and have wedding pictures taken.

E: Then eventually it must have gotten resold.?

D: Mr. Quayle put it on the market and there's a young couple live there I don't know who they are. They are not taking very good care of it.

E: How many years ago was that?

D: I think it might have been 5 or 6 years ago. I remember I saw the For Sale sign. I had no money to buy it. Mr. Quayle had it all restored. The Duffy's lived there. The Duffy's got married on the front porch. I still seem them in the Safeway once in awhile.

E: So they are still living around here? Dorian, I'd like to hear something about your life, you've been teaching. Did you train to be a teacher?

D: Yes I did, when I went to school it was called teacher's college. Sylver Strout she just..all her life I was special to her. She lived in San Francisco, an apt. on Nob Hill and I was sitting on the porch one day after I graduated from Analy. I didn't graduate until I was 19. I didn't start school until I was six. And ...(we were talking about teaching) Well do you want to know how I almost was born in the house?

E: Yes.

D: I was born on my mother's birthday, Dec. 5, 1926. How I happened to be born on my mother's birthday. I was supposed to be born sometime in January. There's a cellar (in the house) my mother was going to the cellar to get some peaches. We always had fruit in the cellar with birthday cakes. We had a dumbwaiter but she wasn't allowed to use the dumbwaiter, the doctor wouldn't let her use it because of her condition. She was in a family way with me. Mother was going to the cellar and fell on the last three steps, she slipped. They had to rush her to the hospital. We didn't have a hospital in Sebastopol and they were rushing her over to the county hospital and I was in such a hurry they had to stop at that general hospital that was in back of Sears and now it is a homeless shelter for the Salvation Army. That's where I was born, I was almost born in this house. You know its because of that house that I had such a happy childhood. That big house and plenty of room to grow and stop being in everybody's hair. We children each had our own corner in the attic and could put all our things in our own corner and no one was ever allowed to touch anything that was in someone else's corner.

E: Dorian, you were a young girl when the Depression came along. What was your family situation like?

D: See the Strout's were very well off.

E: What did your father do for a living?

D.: Shouldn't I finish what happened to my mother. The Depression came along. They didn't have like they have in the bank now, insurance. So we lost all our money. My daddy, my father was fortunate though because my father was in the Corps of Engineers in World War I. So they rounded up the WPA folks, rounded up all the Corps of Engineers to work on these bridges and highways. My daddy was in the Bridge, see he was in France during the War and built all those little bridges there to replace the ones destroyed. So that's is why, people wonder what are those little narrow bridges doing? Well they just used the same railroad bridge patterns that they used in France after the war, my daddy stayed in France after the war because they had to stay there and build up. The Corps of Engineers did all those bridges. My daddy was a surveyor. When he wasn't surveying he would ...I love those bridges, because my daddy helped.. let's see the farthest one north. there's a bridge at the top of the Russian River, I can't think of the name. Carquinez Bridge was the last one.

E: It's a big bridge.

D: Yeah, we loved it, we were children then and we had to go to bed early. Daddy worked on the Carquinez bridge and we got to have a late supper and to bed later. when daddy would get home and my father never drove because of his injury in W.W.I. So a truck would bring him home and leave him off at the bottom of Florence Ave. at Benepe's Barn, which isn't there anymore. Its fun the remember of times past.

E: What kind of injury did your father have in the war.?

D: In those days they got shrapnel when they got ambushed. My daddy went around with a piece of tin in his head. It did something to his equilibrium so he wasn't able to drive.

E: Still he worked.

D: Yes he worked. He never drove but he worked. Like I say he was a surveyor and have you seen those new surveyor things they have now? You look at them if you see them. My daddy had to look those these things, now there is a computer on there. Right on the top of it. All they do is stand around and the computer does it. My father would love that. But he did the surveying for all the bridges out there. And now I send all the pictures of bridges out of the paper to my sister, we keep track of it. Here is this man with the computer thing getting ready for that new bridge. And I said to my little sister in the letter, I bet that's exactly where daddy was standing when they built that other bridge. My daddy got $40 a month from the WPA. However the commodities they gave us, absolutely every material anyone would need, food,clothing, toys for the children. They would bring them up on the porch and put this great huge box on the porch once a month. (E: Who supplied that?) Roosevelt, he did that. WPA. That's what they should have now. My father raised us on $40 a month and we had everything. Now we (seniors) get a little box of cheese, couple pounds butter, package of rice, that's our commodities. We had summer clothing clear down to the underwear. We had winter..we had quilts, blankets. Sheets. Fuzzy flannel sheets. We had shoes. Powdered milk, eggs, potatoes, rice, flour, honey, peanut butter. Cans and cans of produce. Shoes, they knew our sizes. However, then there were about 400 people in the whole town. They couldn't do that now.

C: They didn't give it to each person?

D: No just people on WPA. But there were a lot of people still had their own, lot of people lived on farms and had their own means. Their own businesses. This was just the people on Works Progress Administration (WPA) And my father having been in the Corps of Engineers they needed him to work on bridges over the river.

E: Let's go back to your teaching. You finished college.

D:I went to San Francisco State. When I first went it was teacher's college. Pretty soon they were getting departments I guess you'd call them. One thing I'm very proud of we were the very last, because we were a little college down on Laguna and Market St. We were the last class to graduate from that campus and we graduated from the San Francisco Opera. I've been in the Opera house on the stage. Then they moved out to their new campus, eventually they got more depts.

E: Did you start teaching right away?

D: No I went out... Yes I did I started right after I got out of teacher's college because we had to student teach around in the different schools. Jean Parker on Stockton St. in SF, its a Chinese school, they didn't bus children in those days. Miss Lagomarsino liked my student work so she requested me, that's the best school in San Francisco. She like me cause I was Miss, I don't know, maybe she thought I'd give more time to the children if I wasn't married, maybe. I was there four years. My friend Alice graduated with me, she went to Marysville. She got to go to Germany on foreign exchange.

E: So you wanted to do that?

D: Yeah, so I signed with their district and when they had an opening. I had to take a job at Beale Air Force Base because I was the only kindergarten they had, cause I'm a kindergarten teacher. They had a military bus that came back and forth into Marysville. I lived on I street and the Greyhound bus was only two blocks. I walked over two blocks and get the military bus in the morning and to school, come home in the afternoon. They came in at 4:30 in the afternoon. So I had my transportation and I taught there and I went to England to teach for the one year and came back and took care of my mother. That's how my career ended I just gave it up to take care of my mother. then when my mother passed away I had so many tutoring jobs all over town that I didn't ...and I got a nice apartment in the old Jewell house upstairs. I had a good deal there, right across from the library. I was there 13 years. I had lots of children all around town I tutored. I love my town, I just wanted to be back in my own town again. I was so happy at my apt. across from the library. I had such a wonderful landlord he's still alive, he lives over here on Robinson. Across from St. Stephen's Church.

E: Does he still own that building?

D: Yes, see Mr.Jewell was another mayor of Sebastopol and my grandfather and Mr. Jewell were very good friends. See, I only know the houses by the names, I don't...that's the only way I know them. My mother.. if you look up and see how high the porch is Mother said she ran around with the Jewell girl and they would put their sleeping bags out in summer on the porch and sleep there. You couldn't do that now. I had such fond memories. My mother had spent so much time in that house, I felt like she was there. I'm a deeply sentimental person. Maybe it's not good to be that way, but I am. That's why I was so happy in that house. Then my landlord

was selling the house and I had to get out. But it was perfect timing because this was opening up and I'd been on the list a long time and I wanted that apt. on the corner so I could look up here and see the cottage (Burbank Farm cottage) but it was a bedroom but I had to take a studio because of my income. When I taught school we didn't get money like they do now. About the biggest check I got and I thought I was so rich was $275.00 a month. Of course being in a military town I only paid $65 in rent with everything included. But times have changed because of the monetary system we have now, everything is so expensive.

C: So you got the apt. you wanted?

D: Yes, The lady down there, you know Tina's beauty shop? Well she lived downstairs from me.

E: Was the beauty shop on Main St.?

D: No right across from the library, its painted blue (E: the Jewell house?) Yes, Tina had here beauty shop on Main. The same landlord owned that house too.
She wanted somebody to be there to be quiet and have no car, there was only one place in the back to park. So I got the apt. there. I had all the qualifications. She was the most delightful person. I had 13 happy years living there.

E: Thinking about Tina's Beauty shop, there's been a lot of changes in businesses over the years that you've been in Sebastopol. Going down Main Street, just think of all the....

D: Oh, Whew! I remember Safeway kept moving, you know where Pease is well it was in there. Then it was up there (E: Where Main Street Theatre is now, That was Pease drug store?) Yeah. All my life that's been Pease and all my Mother's life its been Pease.

E: Do you remember Starr Furniture.

D: Yes, that's where all our furniture came ... I went to school with one of the girls.

E: I thought I'd read they also made coffins. Sort of an extra thing they did.

D: I think they did. I think some of my family got some of their coffins.

E: Can you think of any other businesses that were significant.?

D: All these shoe stores. Every other store was a shoe store practically now you can't even buy shoes in Sebastopol anymore. And I remember Purity and it turned into the place called the Bazaar. And now its Fresh Choice, no Food for Thought.

E: Do you remember what Joe's Budget Store was? Where was it?

D: Yes, let me see, I can't quite remember, I'll ask my little sister. She remembers everything. It was 5 cents to go to Santa Rosa on the Petaluma & Santa Rosa RR. We'd go over to that station where they're making a museum in Santa Rosa now that's where it ended up. (Railroad Square Depot) I remember riding on that. Now I can just see myself sitting there riding that. You're bringing lots of memories back. Another thing is too I remember a lot of

things because I never married. My sisters, however I have a little sister with lots of memory, but my sisters and brothers all had families and they had their mind on their families I had plenty of time to fill my mind not being distracted. I wasn't raising children, course I had children at school. I've had plenty of children all my life, somehow I missed out on getting married so I had plenty of space in my computer up here to store things. Details, my little sister is the one that remembers details. Where places were.

C: Do you remember in the parking lot of where Safeway is now there used to be a movie house.

D: Yes it was on this side. Where Mr. Janssen* ~~Janssen,~~ the whole corner, he had a nursery there. And there was a service station on the corner. (E: On Main St. by Glendale Savings? and a parking lot) Oh no on the other side, on the corner where Safeway is now. We had a French Laundry. people sent their curtains to the French laundry, all hand done, in the windows you could see where the curtains were tacked. People would send from San Francisco, oh from all over, to this French laundry. Here's the Methodist church here, there's a little service station on that corner.

end

* bought Henry Martin's Nursery business in 1967